



February 13, 2006

Federal Communications Commission  
ATTN: FCC MB Docket No. 05-311  
445 12<sup>th</sup> Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing in regard to the FCC's proposed rulemaking on video franchising. Progressive News Network (PNN) is a grassroots community-based news and information service that distributes television programming to local communities in Westchester County, NY via eleven local cable access centers. Our programs are produced at a several community media centers, including White Plains Cable Access and Larchmont-Mamaroneck Community-TV.

PNN's programs address a diverse range of local, regional and international topics, including peace and international security, human rights and civil rights, jobs, health care, housing, and civic engagement and participation. On many of our issues we cover, we are one of the only sources of television programming on that particular topic in our local area.

I am writing because our organization is very concerned that the FCC is about to change the basic rules that have long governed the business of delivering multi-channel video to communities across the country. The stakes of your decisions on these issues are enormous, with huge implications for how local residents in our area will be able to access diverse media sources, and benefit from advanced communications networks.

We are very concerned about the implications of telephone company entry into video franchising. Industry giants such as Verizon and other regional Bell companies seek to eliminate local video franchise agreements between local municipalities and video

providers, viewing these franchises as an obstacle to market entry into the video service delivery business.

However, the local video franchise agreements are critically important for ensuring that the corporate giants doing business -- and taking advantage of local rights of way -- will be accountable to consumers and the local public interest. These agreements ensure that community groups like ours will have the ability to produce local programs that are relevant to our community. They also ensure that a variety of voices are heard in the media, including points of view that otherwise would be almost completely ignored by commercial programming.

Any new market entrants such as Verizon ought to be subject to same requirements to broadly serve the entire local community, not just profitable market segments, and to ensure that there is ample access and support for community-originated public interest, educational and local government programming.

As residents of metropolitan New York City, we live in the backyard of highly concentrated and vertically integrated media companies, that tend to emphasize the concerns of New York City and devote significantly less attention to concerns in suburban areas such as Westchester. Those local media companies that do exist are highly commercial in character, and do not cover local, regional or international issues in depth. The commercial media seldom cover many pressing local Westchester concerns relating to low-income issues, access to health care, housing programs, immigrant issues, suburban sprawl, electoral and voting reforms, and local environmental concerns, to name just a few.

By contrast, our local public, educational and government (PEG) channels cover many issues that are relevant to diverse communities, including low-income people, people of color, working families, seniors, youth and immigrants. This programming is critically important for local residents who want to find out what is going on and participate in public and civic life. In addition, our local cable channels and public access centers are one of the only ways by which individuals and non-profit organizations can easily access the tools and training to produce their own programming at minimal cost, and express their own point-of-view through the media.

The public access centers that we use to produce and distribute our programming, including White Plains and Larchmont-Mamaroneck TV, currently get by with minimal resources. We are very concerned about the radical new telephone company proposals for video franchising could result in far fewer public access channels and less resources for local media producers.

In your deliberations on these issues, Progressive News Network urges you to protect our local Public, Educational and Governmental (PEG) channels and community media facilities, and ensure that local municipalities retain their authority to require local video franchising. We urge you to hold all providers of video services to a common standard of providing ample space for community access media. We need the FCC to be on the right side of history, serving as a champion for media diversity, including local viewpoints and local perspectives. We need you to fight for the interests of lower-income market segments that could be underserved or ignored by companies whose only interest is their own bottom line.

Finally, we expect the FCC to defend our rights to free expression, which include the ability to produce and distribute local programs for local audiences. Democracy works best where a wide array of voices and opinions can be heard. If the telephone companies get their way, the result will be a form of market censorship that snuffs out local news, information and opinion. Please hold the line against the powerful interests who seek exemption from long-standing local video franchise requirements.

Sincerely,

Charles Bell  
Editorial & Production Coordinator

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